

Opening Statement
Chairman Dan Burton
Subcommittee on the Western Hemisphere
Committee on International Relations
Hearing on “*U.S. Diplomacy in Latin America*”
July 27, 2005

Over the last several months, the Western Hemisphere Subcommittee has convened hearings on topics ranging from democratization, transparency and the rule of law, gangs and crime, the rise and influence of China in Latin America, and oppression and human rights violations in Cuba. In the last two weeks, we have conducted an assessment of the impact of U.S. diplomacy in Latin America: challenges to the advancement of strategic bilateral and multilateral relationships; perceptions (and misperceptions) about U.S. foreign policy; and the impact and perceptions about U.S. assistance in Latin America and the Caribbean. From these meetings and this hearing today, we hope to achieve a better understanding of the diplomatic opportunities to strengthen U.S. foreign policy in the region.

Advancing democracy has been the key priority of the Bush Administration and it is the stated priority of the new Secretary General of the Organization of the American States (OAS). To pursue this goal, we have an array of bilateral instruments at our disposal to support nascent democracies: from technical and financial assistance to governments in the region in areas like judicial and electoral reform; to other key areas that foster development of a free and open press, and institutional capacity to prevent anti-democratic, corrupt economic activity.

Since September 11, 2001, our public diplomacy efforts have been concentrated in educational and cultural exchanges; information programs; and broadcasting resources focused largely on the Middle East and Muslim world. Some seasoned observers charge that the United States has neglected Latin America in the post-9/11 environment.

Yet most of the non-religious, political and economic factors that came to a head and inspired jihadist terrorists against us are at play elsewhere in the developing world. There is a common infrastructure used by terrorists, by drug traffickers, and by smugglers and these and other criminal syndicates thrive in areas of lawlessness, and in border areas where security is weak. These are some of the growing challenges we face in Latin America.

There are enormous inequalities in Latin America and some contend that efforts to alleviate poverty have stalled; that there is *reform fatigue*; and that a lack of U.S. leadership is partly to blame. Without fresh investment and new jobs, many people question whether the pace of democratic reforms is bearing tangible fruits.

Some seasoned observers say the United States is **pushing too hard** in countries like Venezuela, Haiti, Bolivia, and Ecuador. I am not convinced this is *entirely* true. I am convinced many of the reforms we are supporting in the region are indeed like painful, bitter medicine. But these reforms are necessary.

I have seen instances where there is resistance, opposition to, and outright manipulation of U.S. diplomatic endeavors in the region. And there are forces and influences at work in Latin America that are undermining democracy and the rule of law and sharpening anti-American and anti-globalization sentiment. Yes, we have not done everything right and sometimes we use our “sticks” more than we use our “carrots.” We must learn from our mistakes.

Together with other members of the subcommittee and staff I have visited many of the countries in the region. I have seen firsthand the targeted programs of our foreign assistance and coordinated work with other donors. I believe we are on the right track and more needs to be done. There is also a stronger role for our European allies to play. On the counter-narcotics front, according to the latest UN World Drug Report, cocaine trafficking to Europe and cocaine usage there is rising while it has leveled out in North America. More EU support for alternative development in the Andean region is needed, and we welcome EU support of the demobilization process in Colombia.

I have undertaken this assessment of U.S. diplomacy in Latin America **NOT** to point blame at the shortcomings but rather to take inventory of our shared interests and opportunities to mobilize support of Latin American nations to further democracy and economic progress in the region.

Our diplomats are on the front lines and these have been challenging times. In my work on Cuba, North Korea, Saudi Arabia and elsewhere where oppressive regimes hold sway, I have consistently held the view that the answer to **NOT ENOUGH** democracy is **NOT LESS** democracy... but **MORE** democracy. Latin America is no different in this regard.

We are at a crossroads in Latin America and we must bring to bear our diplomatic efforts to engage the countries in the region that seek to embrace and consolidate democratic reforms. Experience tells us that the chances of success are exponentially greater when these are truly **joint** efforts – when there is BUY-IN from all stakeholders.

Some of our friends in Latin America assert that there is a growing disconnect with the United States, and that “American arrogance” is part of the problem. What I have observed does not support this hypothesis. The United States is engaged and committed in Latin America, but in the post-September 11th climate and in the foreseeable future we will be prosecuting a global war on terrorism. Those who warn about American imperialism are blowing smoke to paint a distorted picture about the roots of problems they would sooner ignore than deal with themselves or in partnership with the United States and other freedom-loving nations.

Diplomacy is less about **SPIN** and more about cultivating relationships to work towards desired outcomes. Advancing democracy and economic prosperity are of paramount importance and it is my hope that our friends in Latin America will soon grow less wary of our intentions and more appreciative of the benefits that come from partnering with us on initiatives to foster democratic change, economic development, and security for their people and ours.